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December 15, 1978

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Secretary has asked me to thank you for your letter of December 5 in which you requested information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle; and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Honorable
Gus Yatron, Chairman,
Committee on Inter-American Affairs,
House of Representatives.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/HR

REVIEWED BY _____ DATE _____

RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXE. DATE _____

TS AUTH. _____ (S) _____

ENDORSE EXEMPTIONS ☐

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The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell in our Bureau of Inter-American Affairs on 632-8562.

Sincerely,

DB/GW

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

ARA/PPC:JSchreiber:mbb
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Clearances: Inter-Agency
ARA:GLister
ARA:JBushnell
H:ENef
EN/GW

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Congress of the United States
Committee on International Relations
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

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CHIEF OF STAFF

December 5, 1978

ACTION
is assigned to
ARA

The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to you regarding the transport of the remains of the Jonestown victims from Guyana and their identification in the United States.

I am deeply concerned that the United States Government recover all of the costs related to the Jonestown operation. The United States should not be responsible for meeting these expenses.

As you know, whenever an American citizen dies abroad, regardless of the cause of death, the body is transported back to the United States at the expense of the deceased's family. While what happened in Jonestown is tragic and unfortunate, I believe that no exception to this policy should be made and that the American people should not be held responsible for the attachment o these costs.

Every effort should be made to obtain reimbursement from surviving family members when they can be located. However, as you are aware, many of the cult members reportedly have no surviving relatives in the United States.

For this reason, I firmly believe that the assets of the People's Temple must be frozen and the costs of the Jonestown operation assessed to the cult for repayment to the United States Government.

I respectfully urge you to take immediate action.

Sincerely,

Gus Yatron

GUS YATRON
Chairman
Subcommittee
on Inter-American Affairs

GY:jc:gw